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## DESIGN AND CONTENTS OF ECCLESIASTES.

THERE is an old tradition<sup>1</sup> that Ecclesiastes was once suspected of heterodoxy by Jewish authorities. A controversy ensued, which ended in the complete victory of Ecclesiastes. The passages impugned, it was contended, were harmless, because the book opened and concluded with divine teaching. It is impossible to believe that two paragraphs the first and the last of the book, could have saved it from condemnation, if it otherwise deserved it. The sense of the above tradition seems rather to be this: Granted that certain passages, if considered by themselves, detached from the context, are objectionable, this is no reason for rejecting the whole book, as no author can guard against this kind of adverse criticism. Ascertain the task which the author set before himself, his starting point and the conclusion at which he arrived, and if these are approved of, all suspicions of implied heresy will easily be dispelled. Such is the case with Ecclesiastes; it begins with a sound principle, with the enunciation which the author proposes to examine and to prove, and ends likewise with an important lesson as the result of the inquiry.

Whatever may be the historical basis of this tradition, it

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<sup>1</sup> There are various versions of this tradition. See *Babyl. Talm. Shabbath* 30b; *Midrash Rabbah*, Lev. xxviii.; and *Kohleth*, i. 3; *Yalkut*, *ibid.* i. 3; and *Prov.* xxv. 1; *Midrash Mishle*, on *Prov.* xxv. 1; the two recensions of *Aboth di Rabbi Nathan*, ed. S. Schechter, p. 2, and additions, p. 68 and p. 150. According to this tradition, the question whether Ecclesiastes should form part of the Holy Scriptures was first raised by the "Men of Hezekiah" (*Prov.* xxv. 1), and settled by the "Men of the Great Synagogue." Later on another question was raised, whether it equalled in sanctity the other books of the Holy Scriptures (*Mishnah Yadayim*, iii. 5). After the decision of the "Men of the Great Synagogue," the former question could not be raised again. The phrase, "they wanted to put aside" (בְּקִשׁוֹ לָנִחוּ), employed in criticising and explaining certain difficult passages in Ezekiel, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and other books, must not be understood literally. It merely takes the place of the question which in Talmud and Midrash usually serves as an introduction to the succeeding explanation.

certainly shows that Ecclesiastes was considered by the ancient Jews as an organic whole, which in all its parts aims at establishing the same truth and recommending the same principle.

The truth which Ecclesiastes seeks to prove is this: *All mundane affairs are vain; only fear of God and obedience to His commandments are essential elements in the life, mission, and happiness of man.*

In this spirit the Targum paraphrases the book; and although in the interpretation of the single verses it follows the Midrashic method, the fundamental principle of the book is never lost sight of.<sup>1</sup>

Many ancient and modern Commentators have adopted this view;<sup>2</sup> but, on the other hand, there are also many scholars of a different opinion. Some think that the object of Ecclesiastes is to defend just the very heterodox principles which the Midrashic objectors believed themselves to have discovered. Foremost among these is S. D. Luzzatto,<sup>3</sup> who holds that Ecclesiastes recommended enjoyment of earthly pleasures, and rejected the theory of the immortality of the soul. Professor Graetz<sup>4</sup> treats Ecclesiastes as a satire on King Herod and his age. Countless other theories have been suggested, and a passage from Dean Bradley's Lectures on Ecclesiastes, in which he seems to enumerate views rejected by him, may suffice to illustrate the great variety and divergence of opinion held by Commentators of the Bible in respect to this question. "It is not a dialogue, still less a medley of fragmentary and conflicting maxims; not the outcome of a penitent and contrite spirit, not an essay on the nature of happiness, still less a gracious revelation of Christian truths, an invitation to a life of ascetic self-denial, or a

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<sup>1</sup> Comp. *Targum* on i. 2, 3: When Solomon, king of Israel, foresaw in prophetic spirit the division of the kingdom between his son Rehoboam and Jeroboam, the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem, and the exile of the children of Israel, he exclaimed: "Most vain is this world, most vain! all my labours and those of my father David are vain! What remains to man after death of all his labour that he laboured under the sun, in this world? except the labour devoted to the Divine Law, for which he will receive of the Lord of the Universe his full reward in the future world;" i. 15: "A man, whose ways have been crooked in this world, and has not repented before his death, cannot improve his ways after his death; and he who has neglected the Law and the Divine precepts during his lifetime, will after his death not be counted with the righteous in Paradise."

<sup>2</sup> Comp. Comm. of Ibn Ezra, Elisha Galico, Obadiah Sforzo, Moses Mendelssohn, etc.

<sup>3</sup> *Ozar Nechmad*, iii. p. 17, 299. Comp. also *Moreh Nebhokhe hazzeman*, by N. Krochmal, p. 121.

<sup>4</sup> *Commentar zum Prediger; Einleitung; and Geschichte der Juden*, iii., 4th ed., pp. 237, 299. Comp. *ibid.*, note 3.

contrast drawn between the hollowness of all that is seen and temporal, and the enduring nature of what is spiritual and eternal." His own view, which may be added to the above list of rejected interpretations, the Dean expresses as follows:—

"The book seems to me to paint in dark, yet most instructive colours, an hour in the history of the pre-Christian age when one great article in the simple creed of the early Jewish Church, its belief in a fully retributive system here below, had been shaken to its base. . . . At such a time came a voice evoking from the distant past the name of the great type and master of human wisdom, sharing all the gloom that had settled on the race . . . and yet seeing even behind the darkest clouds some faint gleams of light; especially fanaticism on the one side, denial of God on the other, holding firm in the shipwreck of hope to some fragments of cheerfulness, even in the bankruptcy of faith, to two things which contain the germs of all that is most precious to our race, the belief in God and the belief in Duty."

A careful analysis of the contents of Ecclesiastes shows that this description of the book is a mixture of truth and error. No shipwreck of hope, no bankruptcy of faith, is discernible. Equally wrong is the Dean in recognising in the author the professed and unflinching pessimist, who holds "that human existence is in itself, as compared with non-existence, a pure evil, and that the only cure is death." His inferences drawn from this erroneous theory in reference to the value of the teaching of Ecclesiastes, as compared with other books and creeds, must therefore likewise fall to the ground.

The following analysis of the contents of Ecclesiastes is independent of the question concerning authorship and age, which will be discussed in a second paper. The integrity of the book has been assumed, and the analysis will justify the assumption:—

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I. INTRODUCTION—Ch. i.

Koheleth<sup>1</sup>—the Hebrew for Ecclesiastes—introduces himself in the heading as the son of David, king in Jerusalem. He seems, after years of success and glory, to have met with reverses and misfortune. Meditating, therefore, on the frailties and vanities of human life, he exclaims: Vanity of vanities!<sup>2</sup> What does man seek and gain by all his struggles through life? Is there anything that remaineth as the result of his labours (יְהִירוֹן)? Does man form an exception to the general rule that all is vain? In all things changes and processes are noticed that seem to be purposeless; and nothing is permanent save these constantly recurring changes. One generation departs from the surface of the earth to make room for a succeeding generation, and in this constant change the earth remaineth for ever. The sun sets in the west, only to rise again in the east. The wind passes by, but is sure to return.<sup>3</sup> The river sends its waters down to the sea, but incessantly repeats the same course. Is man, with all his struggles and pretensions, of a different nature? This is the problem which Koheleth attempts to solve. He determined to examine and explore all that is done under the

<sup>1</sup> *Koheleth*. Partic. fem. Kal of Kahal, "to assemble," "to collect." It is employed as a feminine noun, vii. 27; as a common noun, with the def. art., xii. 8; and as the name of a male person, i. 1, 12; and xii. 9, 10. The feminine form in vii. 27 is by no means accidental; it corresponds to *nafshi* in the succeeding verse, and denotes "experience" or "observation;" also the second half of the verse shows that the author employed here the word *koheleth* in its original meaning, and not as a proper noun. In the other passages, the author personifies his experience or his faculty of "collecting observations," and represents it as his own person.

<sup>2</sup> The Hebrew הַבֵּל הַבָּלִים expresses, after the analogy of קֶרֶשׁ קֶרֶשִׁים, a superlative, and signifies "the most vain." One thing or class is singled out as the vainest, whilst the rest is described as "vain." As the book treats chiefly of the life and actions of man, it is likely that the author thought of himself or of man generally when exclaiming: "Vanity of vanities!" The exclamation is repeated at the end (xii. 8), after the description of man's death. The Hebrew הַבֵּל, a synonym of רוּחַ, "wind," denotes "breath;" hence also "everything windy, unstable, or unsound." The same is expressed by רְעוּת רוּחַ, "companion of wind," i.e., windy and unstable; and רְעִיּוֹן רוּחַ, "thought of wind," or "windy thought." The opposite notion is expressed by תֵּרִיז, "that which remains;" hence "fruit," or "profit."

<sup>3</sup> As to סוֹכֵב and סִכִּיכְתִּי in verse 6, comp. Job xxxvii. 12.

heavens,<sup>1</sup> in search of *the wisdom*—חכמה<sup>2</sup>—in search of the divine plan in man's life, the object to be attained by man through his labours. Koheleth admits that the task is difficult, since everything that he perceives seems to be vain and of short duration—הבל ורעות רוח—but he believes himself to be as well prepared as possible, and having greatly increased the store of knowledge and wisdom which he had inherited from preceding generations, he approaches his task—not, however, without anxiety and fear that he might in the end be disappointed. "For in the multitude of wisdom there is a multitude of anger, and he who increaseth knowledge increaseth pain."

For the purpose of this research Koheleth divides man's actions into such as are dictated by folly (חוללות<sup>3</sup>) and such as are dictated by wisdom (חכמה).

## II.—EXAMINATION OF MAN'S ACTIONS AND THEIR RESULTS.

### A.—Pursuit of pleasure and earthly happiness as dictated by Folly.

1. Pursuit of Pleasure ends in disappointment—(a) Because the pleasures obtained are worthless (ch. ii. 1-16).

Is material pleasure, gratification of the senses, the aim and end of man's labours? Koheleth has himself made an experiment. In possession of the means<sup>4</sup> that enabled him

<sup>1</sup> The phrases, "under the heavens," and "under the sun," so frequently repeated by the author, seem to indicate that there is another world beyond those limits, which is inaccessible to the searching eye of man. It is opposed to *sheol*, ix. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Comp. vii. 23: "All this have I tried because of *the wisdom*; I said, I will be wise, but it is far from me." By "the wisdom," the wisdom of God is here to be understood, as displayed in His works. חכמה, "wisdom," as applied to man, is that element in his soul that enables him to live and work for a higher aim than the mere momentary gratification of his senses. The opposite of the חכם, "wise," is (a) the כסיל, the "fool," who cultivates chiefly the growth of his loins or body; (b) the סכל, the "stupid" (from *sakal=sakhar*, "to obstruct"), whose eyes are obstructed from seeing beyond the closest proximity; (c) *holel* (from *halal*, "to shine"), the silly boaster, who seeks nothing but outward appearance.

<sup>3</sup> Although the letters *sin* and *samekh* frequently interchange, it is possible that the author distinguished between שכליות (i. 17) and סכליות (ii. 3), and employed them in the sense of "reason" and "folly" respectively. In that case the translation of i. 17 would be as follows: "And I devoted my heart to know wisdom and to know folly, and with understanding," etc. *Sikhloth* would then be co-ordinate with *libbi*.

<sup>4</sup> Comp. ii. 12: "For what would a person do who comes after the one that has already been king for a long time" (literally, "whom they have made (*scil.* king) long ago")?

to procure whatever pleasure he desired, and gifted with wisdom and knowledge that enabled him to do everything in the best possible way,<sup>1</sup> he yet could only obtain momentary satisfaction, and his pleasure lasted for only a comparatively short period, it was **הבל** (ii. 11), and not that **יהרון**, the lasting happiness which he sought. When he paused awhile<sup>2</sup> and reflected on what he had accomplished, he discovered too late that his energies and labours had been spent on a worthless object, on **הבל**. He admits that there is a great difference between pleasures controlled by wisdom and reason, and pleasures dictated by ignorance and folly. In the end, however, even this difference is found to be **הבל** (ii. 15): the wise and the fool alike quit these pleasures without any lasting profit.

(b) Because they produce weariness of life (ch. ii. 17-23).

On the contrary, harm is frequently the result. A sense of discontent with our life is created, and thoughts like the following suggest themselves to the reflecting mind: Why shall I labour for my enjoyment. Death may soon render all my schemes vain, and all my labour will thus come to nothing (ii. 17). Perhaps I shall not live long enough to finish what I have begun; another may not be capable of finishing it (ii. 18). Even if I complete it, death may prevent me from enjoying the fruit of my labour, and another who had no share in the trouble will have all the benefit (ii. 21). Such reflections, however, are in themselves **הבל**; they have no sound foundation, and ought not to trouble man in the course of his labours and enjoyments (23).

2. Pursuit of Pleasure is superfluous; Man's Enjoyments are predestined (ii. 24—iii. 15).

There is another reason why labour, for the sake of enjoyment, should be considered as useless. "Man's happiness does not consist in eating and drinking, and enjoying his work," this is not the *summum bonum*; <sup>3</sup> on the contrary, "it is a

<sup>1</sup> *Velibbi noheg bahokhmah* is equal in sense to the corresponding phrase in the beginning of the verse, **תרתני בלב**: "And my heart led me in wisdom, even to take hold of folly."

<sup>2</sup> *Panah*, "to turn aside," to turn away from one's work, to pause. Comp. **אפנה**, Mishnah, Aboth ii. 5.

<sup>3</sup> ii. 24: **שאיכל** is not the same as **משיאכל**, and **אין טוב** therefore does not mean "there is nothing better," but denotes "there is something not good." The author describes it as **אין טוב**, "if man were only to eat and drink, and be of good humour;" and *even this*, though it is **אין טוב**, cannot always be obtained by men. Those who explain **אין טוב** to mean "there is nothing better," ignore the force of the particle **גם**.



הבלי." But even this temporary happiness, vain and windy as it is, is by no means the result of man's labour.<sup>1</sup> It is a gift of God who grants to the good wisdom, knowledge, and joy; and to the sinner the desire to collect and to gather<sup>2</sup> for the benefit of the good. For everything has its season, and everything has its time fixed by the Creator and Ruler of the Universe. If, therefore, happiness and distress are predestined—if joy and mourning, like life and death, success and failure<sup>3</sup> are determined by a superior power, independently of man's labour—all his exertions must be superfluous. "What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth"? (iii. 9.) Whatever his industry and skill may be, if he succeeds, he has only gained the exact share allotted to him by Providence.<sup>4</sup> "Nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it, for God hath done it whom people ought to fear"<sup>5</sup> (iii. 14); "it is He who seeketh הַנִּרְדָּף,<sup>6</sup> that which is run after by man" (iii. 15).

3. Pursuit of Pleasure is only justified in the opinion of the Multitude (iii. 16—22).

But if God, whose attributes are kindness and justice, is the cause of man's success or failure in his search after pleasure, why is there unfairness and injustice in the distribution of earthly goods? I said in my heart, says Koheleth, God will judge the righteous and the wicked; for *there*—with God—and not here on earth, "under the sun," will be the time for every

<sup>1</sup> ii. 25 is a quotation, containing words spoken by God.

<sup>2</sup> The author declares even this idea, that man gathers and collects, as vain and windy. Even this—*i.e.*, the act of gathering and collecting—is not real, because nothing is in reality done by man.

<sup>3</sup> The order in the list of things predetermined by the will of God, is not so arbitrary as it might appear at first. The whole list is divided into two groups (2-4 and 5-8), each concluding with nouns, instead of infinitives with a preposition. The first group includes the chief conditions of man: life, death; illness, recovery; sadness, joy. The second group refers to the actions of man with regard to his family, property, and relations to his fellow-man.

<sup>4</sup> עֵלִים in iii. 11 is derived from "*alam*," "to be hidden," and signifies "that which is hidden" in the heart of man; viz., the thoughts, desires, and intentions. Before נֶתַן supply the relative אֲשֶׁר; the two negatives, מְבַלֵּי and לֹא, express an emphatic positive. The verse is to be translated thus: "He hath made everything beautiful in its time, also the thoughts which He hath set in their heart; in such a manner that it is impossible that man should not find the work that God hath made," etc.; that is, whatever man finds out to do, must necessarily be the same that God has already fixed for him to do.

<sup>5</sup> The first syllable in שִׁירָאֵן (iii. 14) is a relative pronoun, and not a conjunction.

<sup>6</sup> *Nirdaf* denotes the thing which is run after by man, in order to obtain it; the aim and the result of his labour.

will and every act. Koheleth here alludes to a future state of man's soul, as if to say that there is something better for man to hope for than all that he can enjoy in this life. It is only, says the author, when I reason according to the speech of the sons of man<sup>1</sup>—man has no pre-eminence above the beast; he is dust, and nothing more—that I find that the best for man is to enjoy here on earth that which he has obtained as his portion, since no one is able to show him what will follow after his death.

4. Pursuit of Pleasure creates Desire for Wealth, and thus causes Moral Corruption—(a.) Because desire for wealth leads to dishonourable acts (iv. 1—7).

What are the means employed by man in his search after earthly happiness? Not always such as would really further the object in view. As a rule, wealth and luxury are considered the best means of securing well-being and happiness. How is wealth obtained? Great industry and skill is certainly displayed in the race for wealth, but also much ill-feeling is thereby created. The most successful are not always the noblest and the most righteous. The fortune of the one is the source of misery to many; the weak are oppressed by the strong, and the condition of the oppressed is so bad that they prefer death to life. And yet if one were to keep aloof from this race, being convinced that<sup>2</sup> “a handful with quietness is better than both the hands full, with travail and windy thought” (iv. 6), he would be considered a fool; and it would be said of him, “The fool foldeth his hands and eateth his own flesh” (iv. 5).

(b.) Because Desire for Wealth develops selfishness (iv. 8—16).

The race after wealth leads man to selfishness. He plans and acts as if the world belonged to him alone. “There is one alone, and there is not a second; yea, he hath neither child nor brother, yet is there no end of all his labour.

<sup>1</sup> על דברת (iii. 18) admits of two meanings: “according to the word of,” and “after the manner.”—לברם (from *barev*) is a contracted form of Inf. Piel for לבררם, and signifies “in their proving,” or “purifying.” The meaning of the passage is: “When men venture to criticise the works of God, and find that they themselves are as ignorant and stupid as the cattle” (literally, that a multitude—הם, comp. Ezek. xi. 7—of cattle they are to themselves).

<sup>2</sup> iv. 6 contains the thought of the fool, who contents himself with little, and abstains from the race after wealth. נחת, “quietness,” or “contentment,” is opposed to travail and windy thought; that is, to labouring without the prospect of ever reaching a state of contentment and happiness.

Neither is his eye satisfied with riches that he should say,<sup>1</sup> For whom do I labour, and bereave my soul of good?"(iv. 8.) He refuses to divide the fruit of his successful labours with any of his fellow-men. But such conduct must ultimately bring great misery and distress. There are circumstances in which wealth cannot replace a companion or friend. The possession of friends that share with us fortune and misfortune, joy and sorrow, is in all conditions of life better than the possession of silver and gold. Let a person be endowed with the greatest influence and power—let old age still increase his authority—if his conduct be foolish and selfish, if he be an old, but foolish king,<sup>2</sup> he is most unhappy; and a poor and clever child that understands how to win the sympathies of his fellowmen is much happier. Even the hearty welcome given to new kings is soon turned into indifference. For such power is likewise vanity and windy thought.

(c.) Because Desire for Wealth creates Hypocrisy (iv. 17—v. 6).

In his race for wealth and luxury man frequently invokes the assistance of God, and on such occasions he is likely to sin in two ways. In the first place, his schemes are not always such as to justify his appealing to the Most Holy for help; he prays hastily for things, the possession of which is no blessing to him; secondly, he makes promises and vows which he afterwards regrets or ignores. Koheleth utters a warning against this twofold mistake. "Observe<sup>3</sup> thy foot, when thou goest to the house of God"; examine thy ways, whether they are right and good, and thy prayer "will then be sooner accepted than the sacrifices of the fools, who are ignorant, and in ignorance do evil."<sup>4</sup> In reference to the second sin, Koheleth says, "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God, for God is in heaven and thou upon earth; therefore let thy

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<sup>1</sup> The words, "For whom do I labour?" etc., do not express the actual feeling of the selfish and greedy man described in this verse, but what he ought to consider, according to Koheleth.

<sup>2</sup> The past tense in verses 13, 14, may imply that the author speaks here of a certain king of former days; but the past tense is sufficiently justified by the fact that the king is imagined to be old, and at the end of his career.

<sup>3</sup> In speaking of offences directed against God, the author is more emphatic and decided, and addresses his audience or readers directly, and tells them clearly what they have to guard against.

<sup>4</sup> The Hebrew expression for "prayer," תפלה, seems to imply this very idea, that every prayer should be based on self-examination and self-judgment; the word being derived from פלל, "to judge."

words be few. For a dream cometh through the multitude of things, and a fool's voice is known by a multitude of words. When thou makest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it" (v. 1—3); "better not to vow than to vow without fulfilling it" (4).

5. Pursuit of Pleasure, in creating Desire for Wealth, brings Misery.—(a.) By causing trouble and danger (v. 7-11).

The author next proceeds to show how little is gained even by those who are successful in this race for wealth. First, the possession of wealth, far from giving satisfaction and establishing happiness, frequently creates discontent, and fills the mind with a desire for additional riches. "If thou seest in a country oppression of the poor and anarchy,<sup>1</sup> be not surprised; although every high one is watched and protected by a higher one, and each of them is endowed with authority,<sup>2</sup> and a king of a field—a village magistrate—has his officers, they cannot prevent the threatening anarchy." Why? Because "He that loveth silver is not satisfied with silver, and he that loveth abundance is not satisfied with the increase." Oppression of the poor increases in the same proportion as the wealth of the few increases; bad feeling is created, which ultimately breaks forth and finds revenge in a state of disorder and anarchy. The rich and mighty then become aware that wealth is not a source of true and lasting happiness.

(b.) By causing constant fear and anxiety (v. 12-19).

The possession of wealth deprives the possessor of peace and security; he is in constant fear of losing his property. "Riches are kept for the owner thereof to his hurt" (v. 12). He is afraid lest he become poor: "He hath a son, and there will be nothing in his hand. As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and he, the son, will have nothing of all the labour of the father." It is indeed a sore disease, says Koheleth, that man thus labours for the wind, and in addition, "all his days he eateth in darkness, and hath much sorrow and wrath with his sickness" (v. 16). It is much better for man to be satisfied, and to enjoy heartily what God has granted him, however little that may be; and the more so if he possesses riches which he enjoys in ease and peace. In both cases it is not of frequent

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<sup>1</sup> Literally, "the robbery, or the violent prevention of justice and righteousness."

<sup>2</sup> יתרון (v. 8), "that which remains," "surplus," "pre-eminence." The different degrees of power described in the preceding verse upwards, are described in this verse in a descending order, down to the lowest officer.

occurrence that man recognises the hand of God; "for not often doth man remember, in the happy days of his life,<sup>1</sup> that it is God who made him sing<sup>2</sup> in the joy of his heart" (v. 19).

(c.) By causing a feeling of uneasiness and discontent (ch. vi.).

Riches do not make man happy, and are even a source of grief, if the possessor has no children. He is vexed at the thought that a stranger shall inherit all his property. But, on the other hand, a large family is, in a different way, a source of cares and anxieties. "If a man hath many children, and liveth many years, and counteth many happy days," but finds his happiness marred in the end, having not left even so much as would secure a grave for him, "I thought," says the author, "that an untimely birth was better than he" (vi. 3). Better not to live at all than to live—be it only the last days—in want and misery. But man, having once come into existence, struggles for life with all his might,<sup>3</sup> "and also the appetite for life is not filled" (vi. 7). For what is it that the wise, the intelligent poor—עני יודע—hath more than the fool? Is it "that he knows how to die<sup>4</sup> in the presence of others that live?" (vi. 8) or rather that he knows how to act according to the maxim, "Better is it to live than to die?" (9) But all such meditations are חבל; because we are not asked whether we like to be born as an untimely birth or with a constitution to live for a thousand years: "We may not contend with him who is mightier than we are" (10), and who has determined our fate. We do not even know the real purpose of life,<sup>5</sup> and are, therefore, not capable of determining what its duration should be.

<sup>1</sup> The phrases, "the days of his life," "the days of the years of his life," denote the distinguished days, or the happy days of his life. Comp. Gen. xlvii. 9, and *infra* vi. 3.

<sup>2</sup> טענה, from ענה, "to sing." Comp. Ps. cxlvii. 7.

<sup>3</sup> This is the meaning of vi. 6: "And even if man lived a thousand years, twice told, and enjoyed no good, he does not abandon his hopes and his struggle for life; all go to one and the same place;" that is, all aim at the same thing: life. This idea is continued in the next verse: "All the labour of man is for his mouth, to maintain himself; and even the desire to live, if he has no longer strength for labour, will never cease during lifetime."

As תמלא, comp. i. 8.

<sup>4</sup> להלך, vi. 8; and מהלך, ib. 9; from *halakh*, "to go," "to depart," "to die."

<sup>5</sup> מה יותר, vi. 11: "What will remain, as the fruit and purpose of life?" Comp. יתרון, i. 3: vi. 12, ויעשם כצל, "and he shall make (or consider) them as the shadow which is followed by sunshine." אשר אחריו, "after which," the relative referring to צל, "shadow." The sense of the verse is: "Who knows what is good for man to do during his vain or short existence on earth, and who can tell him what can come after it?" The former is compared to the shadow, the latter to the brightness that follows the shadow, being "under the sun."

*B. Man's Actions, dictated by Wisdom.*

1. Wisdom is a source of happiness in man's various conditions (vii. 1-22).

There is certainly something better in life than wealth and luxury. "Better a good name, acquired by a conduct regulated by reason—*חכמה וחשבון*—than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of one's birth" (vii. 1). To him who has acquired a good name by a virtuous life, the day of death is better; he has a good name that cannot be destroyed for ever. To him who has not acquired a good name, the day of death is better, in so far as it puts an end to a useless and bad life. The wise, therefore, does not seek merriment and pleasures; these he leaves to the *כסיל*, the fool. He prefers earnest and serious reflections;<sup>1</sup> in trying times he preserves equanimity; he is not impatient, nor easily led to anger. He knows how best to enjoy the "day of good," and how to bear the "day of evil." He does not think himself too good to meet with reverses, nor so bad as to be deprived of every hope for better times. He will listen to criticism on his conduct, without admitting everything said against him.

2. Man's Wisdom is imperfect when entirely left to itself (vii. 23-29).

By these instances Koheleth intends to show that there exists in man himself a certain faculty that enables him to live happily with wealth and without it. But, as he has anticipated in the first chapter, he has not succeeded in discovering what is the purpose and the divine plan—the *חכמה*—in all that is done under heaven. "All this," he says, "have I tried, because of the divine wisdom—*בִּחְכְּמָה*; I said, I will be wise, but it was far from me (viii. 23). Far off is that which has been far off, and that which has been deep is still deep. Who will find it?" (24) He had to be content with examining the actions of men, and to distinguish between reason—*חכמה וחשבון*—on the one hand, and folly and wickedness on the other. In discovering the latter Koheleth had no difficulty; folly and wickedness<sup>2</sup> he saw fully deve-

<sup>1</sup> *כַּעַס*, vii. 3, is different from *כַּעַס*, vii. 9; the meaning is in either case easily determined by the context.

<sup>2</sup> The greater development of folly is indicated by the numerous terms employed in describing it: *רשע*, *כסיל*, *סכלות*, *הוללות*; whilst, for the opposite quality, the author had only two nouns: *חכמה* and *חשבון*. The latter term denotes the weighing and testing of our actions with regard to their intrinsic value, as well as to their consequences. As to the meaning of the other terms, see p. 34, note 2. *הוללות* seems here to be used as an adjective describing the three nouns: *רשע*, *כסיל*, and *סכלות*.

loped to its highest pitch, but not so wisdom and virtue. Koheleth personifies wisdom and folly, which are represented here, as in the Book of Proverbs, as women: "I found that which is more bitter than death, the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her, but the sinner shall be taken by her" (26). "As to that which yet my soul sought, but I found not, the perfect *חכמה וחשבון*, one person among a thousand have I found," that may fairly be called *אדם*—"man;" "but a woman," the personified *חכמה*, "among all these have I not found." I have not met with a person as perfect in wisdom as I found persons perfect in folly. The cause of this strange fact is not to be sought in a defective creation of man, but in his desire to complicate the conditions of life. "Lo, this only have I found, that God made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions" (29).

3. A Guide is given to Man's Wisdom—(a). Confidence in the guide ensures lasting happiness (ch. viii.).

Although reason (*חכמה וחשבון*) is a better guide to happiness than folly (*סכלות והוללות*), success depends on Providence. Koheleth is convinced that the gifts of Providence are distributed according as man is good before God or not. But how can man find out what is good before God? What mortal can fathom the wisdom of divine Providence and Justice? "Who is so wise as to know how to solve the difficulty? A man's wisdom would make his face to shine, and the majesty of his face would be doubled" (viii. 1). Human reason being insufficient, Koheleth entrusts himself implicitly to the guidance of a higher authority,<sup>1</sup> whose will he endeavours to perform. "My advice is," he says, "to keep the command of a king, and that in the manner of a divine oath" (2). Man must not be discouraged if the acts of God seem arbitrary and without relation to man's obedience or disobedience to His will. "Whoso keepeth the commandment shall know no evil thing, and a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment"<sup>2</sup> (5). He knows that there is time and judgment for everything. When the wickedness of his fellow-men seems great to him, and in disharmony with their prosperity, he will remember that their end is not yet

<sup>1</sup> מלך is here used in the sense of "absolute monarch," whose commands must be obeyed unconditionally. It is without the article, and it is by no means necessary to assume that the author thought of one special king. The term מלך represents figuratively the Divine authority revealed in the Law and through the prophets. The author seems to avoid the distinct mention of Divine revelation, and to found his dicta solely on *חכמה*, "wisdom."

<sup>2</sup> Comp. iii. 17.

known, and when that comes, no power, no cunning of the evildoers, can save them from the consequences of their conduct (viii. 8). I have seen, the author says, at a time when one man ruled over another to his hurt, wicked people buried, and gone, and they had departed from the place of the holy, and were forgotten in the city where they had ruled in that manner (viii. 10). Their success was only temporary, **הכל**. Punishment does not immediately follow every sin; but I know, says Koheleth, that good awaits only those that fear God. As in reference to earthly enjoyments he taught that man must try to be happy in the enjoyment of that which God has allotted to him for his life under the sun, so with regard to the present inquiry he counsels man to rest content with that which has been revealed to him, and to bear in mind that he is unable to discover the divine place in everything that is done under the sun.<sup>1</sup>

(b.) Occasional neglect of this guide is followed by serious consequences (ix. 1—x. 11).

The experience, however, on which Koheleth founds his theory seems to have been limited; he has seen some wicked people perish, and concludes that when evildoers prosper, their happiness is only temporary, and they will in the end have their full reward. But cannot the same be said about the righteous? Are they not likewise in the hand of the Almighty who determines their fates and even their conduct? Are they not also overtaken by misfortune and death?<sup>2</sup> "It is an evil," says the author, "that one thing—death—happens to all, because the sons of man conceive evil thoughts, and folly is in their heart while they live, for they think after that they will join the dead."<sup>3</sup> They are mistaken, as

<sup>1</sup> **בשל**, viii. 17, in error (= *beshal*; comp. 2 Sam. vi. 7, and ib. iii. 27).

<sup>2</sup> The different kinds of divergence in the characters of men, enumerated in ix. 2, seem to have been arranged in a descending order; beginning with the just and wicked, who are diametrically opposed to each other in every respect; next are those who perhaps do not differ so much in outward action, but in thought and speech: the good and pure on the one hand, the impure on the other; the third place is occupied by those who have the same intentions, but not the same willingness to sacrifice part of their own; or the one is more careful and successful in guarding against sin than the other: the good, and he that sins; or more energetic and enthusiastic in doing a noble act than the other: he that swears to do the good thing required, and he who fears to bind himself by an oath.

<sup>3</sup> **אחרי**, ix. 3, is probably an adverb like *yachadav*, and the affix *av* has not the force of a pronoun. The words, "in their lifetime, and after that to the dead," and the verses which follow (4-10) express the feelings and the arguments which lead "the sons of men" to their follies; viz., The life "under the sun" is only lived once, the dead never again share in its joys and its labours. In this life we must work and enjoy, if God has thus predetermined "the course of our life" (verse 7).



experience teaches. While it may sometimes seem as if people met with failure or success, not only independently of their moral conduct, but also independently of industry and skill, as if man's fate was decided by *chance* alone, it is also<sup>1</sup> an undeniable fact that in many instances reason has proved to be the source of success, and folly that of failure and ruin. "By his wisdom a wise man saved a whole town from destruction." The wise man must only be extremely careful, lest all the good he might be able to do be undone even by a slight mistake (ix. 18). "Where there are dead flies the finest ointment is spoiled; so doth a little folly outweigh wisdom and honour" (x. 1). A wise man must always have his head in the right place. Especially careful ought one to be who desires to rule or guide others,<sup>2</sup> because in his case negligence entails serious evils (x. 4—9). Furthermore, a wise man must always be prepared and ready to make use of his wisdom.<sup>3</sup> "If the serpent bite because there is no enchantment, then there is no profit to the charmer" (11). What is said here of wisdom applies with equal force to virtue and goodness. A pure life is easily corrupted, when concessions, however small, are made to temptation. The argument implied in these remarks is—We cannot correctly estimate another man's moral conduct and accordingly criticise God's justice?

(c.) Those who altogether ignore the Guide cause harm and mischief (x. 12—20).

Although the wise do harm by slight mistakes, the mischief done by foolish and wicked people is still far more serious. This is illustrated by the evils caused through foolish talk<sup>4</sup> and through misgovernment. With regard to the latter, the author exclaims, "Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a lad, and thy princes eat in the morning!" (x. 16). "By much slothfulness the building decayeth, and through idleness

<sup>1</sup> The force of the phrase, *gam zo*, "even so," is this: "Even granted that we notice occurrences which appear to us the outcome of mere chance."

<sup>2</sup> Literally, "If the spirit of the ruler cometh over thee" (x. 4).

<sup>3</sup> ייתרון הכמה: "And the advantage of preparation is wisdom;" or, "Wisdom consists in the advantage of preparing for eventual emergencies."

<sup>4</sup> x. 14: "And the fool increaseth words; man—*i.e.*, he who listens to the fool—knoweth not what shall be; and who can tell him what shall be the consequence of following him (מאחריו)? He can neither learn from the fool what the latter desires him to do; nor, if he understands what the fool desires him to do, can he foresee the evil consequences of such conduct." "He who does not know the way to the city, will be much wearied by the labour of the foolish, if he happens to have them as guides" דרך עמל (x. 15)=עמל, "laborious way;" hence the feminine in תיגענו.

of the hands the house droppeth through (18). A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry; and money answereth all things" (19). The people feel unhappy and are in constant fear. "Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bed-chamber, for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter" (20).

4. Wisdom does not demand abandonment of earthly pleasures, but their regulation by the fear of God (xi. 1—xii. 7).

Reflecting on the diverse theories above-mentioned—on the one hand that man is the master of his fate, that he has it in his power to be a blessing or a curse to himself and others, and on the other hand that his fate is determined by a superior power without his consent and knowledge; on the one hand that it is good for man to enjoy life, and on the other that all enjoyment under the sun is vain (הבל) without any reality—Kohaleth gives to his fellow-men this practical advice: Make these views, however contradictory they may seem to be, the basis of your conduct. This lesson is given in a figurative speech as follows: Cast thy bread<sup>1</sup>—which thou mayest want at present—upon the waters; for thou shalt find it after many days. But do not cast all thy bread upon the waters; reserve sufficient for seven months—till the usual time of harvest—and also something for the eighth month, as the harvest may be delayed. Take notice of rain and wind<sup>2</sup> for thy sowing and reaping, but do not thereby neglect the necessary work; sow in the morning and sow in the evening, if it is uncertain which will succeed better. This figurative lesson is followed by a second one: "The light is sweet, and it is good for the eyes to behold the sun" (xi. 7). And yet it would not be good always to behold the sun; there must be shadow and darkness; so also "if man<sup>3</sup> hopes to live many years let him rejoice in all of them;" but "every one that has come into this transient existence" must also remember that the days of darkness

<sup>1</sup> "Thy bread;" *i.e.*, thy corn. The seed is thrown "upon the waters;" that is, after the rain of Heshvan or Kislev.

<sup>2</sup> The meaning of xi. 3 is: "When clouds are noticed, it may be assumed as probable that it will rain, and the work may be arranged accordingly; in the same manner, when the trees are observed to begin to incline in a certain direction, it may be assumed as probable that a wind in that direction will prevail; yet (says the author) he will never do his work who is guided exclusively by these observations." וְהוּא, "it will blow." Comp. Job xxxvii. 6.

<sup>3</sup> וְיִחְיֶה... (xi. 8), "If he will live," *scil.* in his thought or imagination. Let man rejoice in the idea and hope that he will live many years; but he must also be prepared that these years will include days of darkness and misfortune.

will be many (8). Koheleth in a similar manner exhorts man to take the two opposite views as the basis for his conduct: The pleasures of life are given us for our enjoyment, and Our will is to be directed after the will of a higher Being. "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thine heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but, at the same time, know thou that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment (xi. 9). And remove anger and regret from thine heart and evil from thy flesh, for childhood and youth are quickly over<sup>1</sup> (10). Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth<sup>2</sup> before the evil days come, and the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them" (xii. 1). The author then describes in a vivid manner, in three different figures,<sup>3</sup> the gradual decay of the body of man, till at last dust returns to dust, and the spirit returns unto God who gave it. Pointing to the lifeless body, Koheleth exclaims, Vanity of vanities! source of man's vanities, of his ambition, greediness, sensuality, and luxury! all this has ceased; all this has been *הבל*, vanity! But there is still one element in man's life that is not *הבל*: the *spirit* "that returns to God" (xii. 7).

### III.—CONCLUSION, xii. 8—14.

The task which the author has proposed to himself is accomplished. He has demonstrated the vanities of man: but he has done more; being a wise man, he has at the same time given certain positive knowledge to the people in the form of proverbs and sayings,<sup>4</sup> carefully weighed and examined. These are words of importance, words of truth, words of the wise, which in some cases drive on "like goads," and encourage to actions; in others check and restrain, like

<sup>1</sup> The days of youth are soon over, and the consequences of folly and excess cannot be remedied. They are avoided if man during the earlier period of his life follows the Divine guide given him for his conduct throughout his life.

<sup>2</sup> *בחרותיך*, "thy youth," not as opposed to manhood, but to old age. The term is therefore to be understood in the sense of "thy strength."

<sup>3</sup> (a) The change of sunshine into cloudiness; (b) the change of the stir and bustle in a castle into stillness and lethargy; (c) the destruction of the means of supplying the oil to the lamp, or the water to the bucket. *נֹלֵת* (xii. 6) is the oil reservoir for the lamp. Comp. Zech. iv. 2.

<sup>4</sup> These either refer to sayings and lessons included in Koheleth, or to other collections of proverbs.

"the stakes of the folds," or fences by which the sheep are kept together,<sup>1</sup> and prevented from running further. They all come from the same shepherd, originating in the same source, viz., the desire to teach and benefit the people. He could say far more, but all is included in the maxim: *Fear God, keep His commandments, for that is the whole man* (xii. 13); *man is responsible to God for his actions as well as for his innermost thoughts*. "God shall bring every action into judgment, with every secret thought, whether it be good or whether it be evil" (14).

M. FRIEDLÄNDER.

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<sup>1</sup> בעלי אספות (xii. 11) is not an attribute to חכמים, but to משמרות גטועים.

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